

Homophobia, Denial, Death: *American Beauty* Revisited

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Abstract

American Beauty (1999), written by Alan Ball and directed by Sam Mendes is a film that encapsulates many aspects of life in the American suburbia at the turn of the century. The focal character, one Lester Burnham, aged forty-two suffers from an acute existential crisis when Angela, friend to Lester's daughter Jane, appears in his life and upholds the opportunity to escape from his mundane existence and relive his youth. On the other hand is a retired U.S. Marine, Colonel Frank Fitts, a repressed homosexual, who along with his wife Barbara and son Ricky moves to the Burnhams' next-door. This paper intends to reread *American Beauty* not through the perspective of Lester Burnham but through the eyes of Colonel Frank Fitts, who does more to shape the plot than Lester himself. While bringing in to discussion Jody W. Pennington's views on the film, this paper highlights the limitations of his work and investigates grounds for a deeper understanding and motivations of the 'absent/present' character Frank Fitts. While reading the film as a text, this paper also cross-references the [un]altered film scripts of *American Beauty* to show how layered the emotions are and how strong the ramification of Frank who, although, a 'murderer', is as innocent as the one 'murdered'. He is, to quote one Indian poetess, "the sinner and the saint". Focusing on the psychoanalytical implications of 'denial' this paper tries to project how Frank's tragic denial of his sexual orientation contributes to his homophobia while challenging, albeit indirectly, our deep-seated notions of 'normativity'.

Keywords: Homosexuality, Repression, Denial, Homophobia, American Cinema.

The movie you see is not the movie I thought I was shooting. I thought I was making a much more whimsical, comic story, kaleidoscopic, almost like a Coen brothers' movie. And what I found in the cutting room was a much more emotional, haunting animal than I had imagined.

- Samuel Alexander Mendes (Mueller, 2008)

"My dad thinks I pay for all these with catering jobs. Never underestimate the power of denial".

- Ricky Fitts (Ball & Mendes, 1999)

American Beauty (1999) written by Alan Erwin Ball and directed by Samuel Alexander Mendes not only won in five major categories at the 72nd Academy Awards (Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Screenplay Written Directly for the Screen and Best Cinematography) but also took the celluloid world by the storm. Besides being a critical and commercial success, the film has provided major scopes for analysis and academic debate in the last twenty years. *American Beauty*, without a single strain of doubt, is a film that depicts a very

short-span of the life of its focal character, Lester Burnham (Kevin Spacey Fowler). All other characters seem to be mere instruments that further amplify and contribute to his crisis. Since its initial screening at the Grauman's Egyptian Theatre on the 8th of September, 1999, all the aspects of the film that have been discussed over time focus primarily on Lester Burnham, his relationship with his wife and daughter, beauty, existentialism and so on. But, very few discussions are found on Col. Frank Fitts (Christopher Walton Cooper), who seems to be on a semi-permanent mute and thus enjoys an absent/present focality. Audience and critics alike have picked up the hint that his latent homosexuality and denial contribute to the murder of Lester Burnham. Jody W. Pennington in *The History of Sex in American Film* (2007) argues that ". . . in *American Beauty*, sex and personal identity are closely interwoven" (Pennington, p. 104) and stresses further that "besides being central to identity, sex is also crucial for relationships" (Pennington, p. 105) in the film. In his analysis, he stresses that "there [are] also shades of *Psycho* in *American Beauty*'s suggestion that the only cathartic release for repressed homosexuality is murder" (Pennington, p. 106). Although, he focuses on Frank, his repressed homosexuality commenting it to be "an anguished self-interrogation" and its outcome, he fails to recognise that not only the murder of Burnham, as it will be seen, but all his actions on and beyond the film are determined by this sole factor.

American Beauty is primarily a film about denial. All the characters deny over and over again who they are or what they are before the dam eventually breaks open, and they accept, although if momentarily, their real 'selves'. Yet it is only a matter of time before they once again "prepare a face to meet the faces that [they] meet". But this transit also has its cost. A life is lost. And voila! It is "a father who's [anything but] a role model [to his daughter] . . . some horny geek-boy who's gonna spray his shorts whenever [his daughter] bring[s] a girlfriend home from school . . . a lame-o . . . [who] should just [be put] out of his misery". And so he is, in the end.

Monotony, imprisonment and subsequent redemption are central to the thematic structure of the film. While monotony is symbolised through colours and clothing, imprisonment is symbolised through scenes that depict the confinement of the shower where Lester is seen to masturbate, or through his reflection on the computer screen at his workplace in which he is barred behind columns of numbers and so on. But, redemption can be achieved only at the cost of death. Although characters are frequently seen talking about death and death being present as a palpable motif – the narrator at the very beginning of the film telling us he is "forty-two years old. In less than a year [he] will be dead", Rickey (Wesley Cook Bentley) filming a dead bird with his camera, a funeral procession passing by Jane (Thora Birch) and Ricky as they return home from school, Ricky talking about "the homeless woman who froze to death" – only one character is depicted to die on screen.

Initially, Alan Ball's film script of *American Beauty* was much bleaker than the final version that was eventually captured on camera. In the unaltered version, Lester is not killed by Frank Fitts rather Lester and Angela's (Mena Alexandra Suvari) illicit love affair is consummated, and they run away. The filmmakers were apprehensive about the boldness of the ending, and yet they did not show any intention to alter it. Eventually, Walter F. Parkes, the then president of DreamWorks Pictures, convinced Alan to change the ending of the script and consequently the ending was rewritten.

In the new ending, which comes more out of necessity than pure artistic impulse, first, Lester and Angela's affair remains unconsummated; Burnham realises the futility of his desire towards Angela when he discovers that she is a virgin and as a result withdraws himself from indulging in the act. And second, Burnham is murdered. While the first alteration in the final draft of the film script is motivated mainly to avoid controversies – even after which, the film

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has often been paralleled with Vladimir Nabokov's much controversial yet highly acclaimed 1955 novel *Lolita*, from which one can easily assume what potential sparks of controversy the actual script had of igniting – the death of Lester Burnham has added extra philosophical dimensions to the film. And as a consequence, it has also provided the audience and critic with the possibility to ponder over the question 'why' does he have to die, a question that not only remains a mystery but also one that ever eludes interpretation. But if one only notices the motif of 'denial' in the film, it becomes clear why Lester Burnham loses his life, even though he has not done anything morally so wrong that he should end up having the noose around his neck. He knows "he could be pretty pissed off about what happened to [him]" for he is another guiltless soul, as guiltless as the man who, in the end, "put[s] him out of his misery".

In *Techniques of the Selling Writer* (1974) author Dwight V. Swain defines a focal character as "the person on whom the spotlight focuses; the center of attention; the man whose reactions dominate the screen." (Swain, 1981, p.220) If we are to accept Swain's definition of the term, then technically Col. Frank Fitts is not a focal character in the film, yet he is as crucial to the plot as Lester Burnham. Col. Frank Fitts works as a catalyst in many ways and drives the plot to its eventual ending. He terrorises everyone around him, especially his wife and son. He is thoroughly suspicious. No one in the film ever gets a good word from him. He has driven, as is apparent, his wife to catatonia. One might even argue that his methods of upbringing his son Ricky with his rigorous "structure and discipline" eventually culminated in his son becoming a drug addict/dealer. As we see in the film, it is due to him and his tyrannical attitude that his son eventually leaves his 'father's' house forever and Ricky's departure also provides Jane with the opportunity to leave her family behind. Though this is not depicted in the film, one can easily imagine that the young couple is not left with any other alternative.

Interestingly, after Walter F. Parkes convinced Alan to rewrite the ending of the script, he not only removed the scene involving Lester and Angela's consensual yet profane consummation and instead had Lester ending up dead, he also added some further court-trial scenes where Jane and Ricky are falsely accused of Lester's murder and are sent to juvenile prison. And the man who seals their fate is none other than the murderer, Col. Frank Fitts who provides the police with the videotape where Jane in a mock-serious manner asks Ricky to murder her father for her. Mendes says in this regard:

The first was a kind of prologue in which the kids were found guilty of Lester's murder which was paid off at the end. And we decided to excise that in the last week of editing in the cutting room and it changed the whole nature of the film. (American Beauty (Part 2)- The Missing 27 Pages, 2016, 05:15–05:28)

If we take the altered and removed scenes into consideration, it becomes evident that Alan Ball intended the character of Frank Fitts to be of more importance in the plot of the film. Although some scenes were cut out during editing, they do not change the impact that Frank has on the course of the film by any major degree.

When the inner sanctum of Fitts household is introduced to the audience for the first time near the one-eighth part of the film, the three members of the family, the tyrannical father, retired U.S. Marine Col. Frank Fitts, the submissive mother Barbara (Allison Brooks Janney) and their son Ricky, obsessed with his camcorder, are about to have their breakfast before Ricky leaves for school. We see Ricky's mother offering her son bacon for breakfast, but Ricky replies "I don't eat bacon, remember?" to which she answers "I'm sorry. I must have forgotten" as the little smile that was dangling from the corner of her mouth evaporates. This 'forgetfulness' may be taken as a random occurrence yet has three-fold significance. First, it is a clever ploy on the part of both the writer Alan Ball and director Sam Mendes to establish the

idea that Ricky was away from home for a long time which has resulted in his mother forgetting her own son's food preferences. The fact that Ricky was away from home is later established in the film when Angela tells Jane that she knows Ricky and tells her the 'story' that how "one day, he was just, like, gone". Ricky himself confirms it when he tells Jane afterwards that how he was sent to Military School where "of course, [he] got kicked out" and eventually his "dad put [him] in the hospital, they drugged [him] up and left [him] in there for two years". Second, this highlights and fortifies Barbara's catatonia as the 'disease' contributes to cognitive disorders such as amnesia; after all, she has 'forgotten'. Third, all these things are mere chain reaction that can be traced back to Frank's tyranny. Although all the characters in the film are victims in some way or other including Frank himself, his wife Barbara is a direct victim of Frank's tortures which are merely hinted at in the film.

The scene continues with Rickey coming to the table with only the scrambled eggs on his plate. With a medium close-up shot, the camera lingers on Ricky as he sits on the chair. In the next shot, again another medium close-up, Frank, at the dinette, bespectacled, is reading *The Wallstreet Journal*. A little cynical chuckle on his lips; his son asks "What's new in the world, dad?" to which Frank in a tone, yet to become typical of him, replies "this country is going straight to hell." He is the undisputed patriarch of the house, one who is authoritarian to the core. The family dynamics and their self-imposed social exclusion unfold in the next scene when the doorbell rings and all the characters become 'alarmed' all of a sudden. The film script reads as follows:

A DOORBELL rings. The Colonel and Barbara look at each other, alarmed.

COLONEL (CONT'D)

Are you expecting anyone?

BARBARA

No.

(thinks)

No.

One explanation for this 'alarm' might be highlighted with the fact that they are new to the neighbourhood and therefore surprised at the mere ringing of the doorbell as they are not expecting any visitors. But, Alan Ball's choice of the word 'alarmed' while writing the script and the incident that follows, point otherwise. The script continues:

"The Colonel heads toward the living room, a little puffed up."

Again, Alan Ball is conscious in his choice of words. The *Collins Dictionary* (Online Edition) defines 'puffed up' in the following terms: "If you describe someone as puffed up, you disapprove of them because they are very proud of themselves and think that they are very important." (*Puffed up Definition and Meaning / Collins English Dictionary*, 2020) This is exactly the case with Frank Fitts. As he approaches the door, he assumes an air of importance and superiority, and the scene is about to become ironic – the reason of which will later be revealed in the film – when he opens the door to reveal the two Jims. The two Jims have come to introduce themselves to their new neighbours with some little housewarming gifts. But Frank becomes suspicious of their intentions without any good reason and asks them: "Let's cut to the chase, okay? What are you selling?" As they try to clarify their intentions, he interrupts them and asks "Yeah, yeah, yeah. But you said you're partners. So what's your business?" When they introduce themselves as partners it becomes apparent to the audience that they are couples, yet Frank seems reluctant to accept it.

In a study conducted by a team of professors from the University of Rochester,

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University of Essex, England, and the University of California in Santa Barbara, the researchers found that homophobic tendencies might be a byproduct of same-sex attraction and its subsequent denial. Netta Weinstein, Assistant Professor, School of Psychology, University of Essex, a lead author of the study, suggests:

Individuals who identify as straight but in psychological tests show a strong attraction to the same sex may be threatened by gays and lesbians because homosexuals remind them of similar tendencies within themselves. (*Is Some Homophobia Self-Phobia?*, 2012)

Col. Frank's reluctance to accept the obvious – Jim and Jim are more than partners, they are gay couples – springs from his 'threatened' state of psyche. Frank – who is partially based on Alan Ball's father, whom Ball believed to be latent homosexual – has repressed his homosexual inclinations. Ball in an interview with *The Advocate* (The National Gay & Lesbian Newsmagazine) opined:

[My father] was a deeply unhappy man. There was always something broken and silent about him I never quite understood. . . I don't know if that was true for a fact, but it led to the notion [in *American Beauty*] of a man who gave up his chance to be himself by denying his true sexuality, then seeing his son possibly malting that choice for himself and being freaked out by that. (Kilday, 2000)

Frank grows restless as is clear from the next scene with Rickey in his car when he gives his son a ride to school. Alan Ball, here in this scene, focuses primarily on Frank's reaction to the two Jims. The script reads: "The Colonel drives, staring darkly at the road ahead." Once again, it would do good to look at Alan Ball's choice of word here. In the English language, the expression to describe someone who looks at something vacantly is "staring blankly". But Alan Ball's conscious phrasing "staring darkly" to describe Frank after his encounter with the two Jims has multiple undertones. He is not merely "staring blankly" at the road ahead. Unlike a play, that can be read as well as performed, giving it an added third dimensionality upon the stage, the film script is specifically meant to be watched and heard. The characters through their performances underscore or emphasise the screenplay. And Chris Cooper, who plays the role of Frank in the film, portrays these connotations to a definite end. The word "darkly" here not only connotes the tension underneath Frank's psyche but also conveys in a way the "mystery" that engulfs his character. His reactions to everything around him seem mysterious; why does he behave the way he behaves? The audience, for now at least in the film, is compelled to fill up the void with their back-story to the character. Here, the director introduces a brilliant element in which we hear Frank humming a tune, the only time perhaps in the first half of the film where he acts not as a machine, but a man. He comes out of his psychological fortress, if only for a short time, before he once again recedes inside his shell, a perfect simile for which would be the flash of lightning in absolute darkness. And his humming can only be interpreted as an auditory equivalent of nervous doodling before he brings up the topic: "How come these faggots always have to rub it in your face? How can they be so shameless?" In response to which his son, distracted with his calculations, replies, "That's the whole thing, dad. They don't feel that's anything to be ashamed of." which builds up the nervous tension of the scene as Frank retorts "Well, it is", not so much to his son as to his self. "It shames Colonel Fitts psychopathically" (Pennington, p.106). Frank continues as he receives Ricky's careless response: "Don't placate me like I'm your mother, boy." Ricky picks up the hint, as is clear from his facial expressions, and he returns to his father with "Forgive me, sir, for speaking so bluntly. Those fags make me want to puke my fucking guts out." Not being honest to his own opinions but only to please his father, which he does over and over again almost throughout the whole course of the film. Richard Ryan, a professor of Psychology at the University of Rochester, co-author of the study mentioned earlier who helped direct the research, comments:

“In many cases, these are people who are at war with themselves and they are turning this internal conflict outward.” Frank’s disgust for the Jims is a direct result of his own inability to ‘become’ what he is. And hence, to use the Nietzschean terminology, we see him expressing “ressentiment” towards the two Jims. Ian Buchanan in *A Dictionary of Critical Theory* (2018) defines the term “ressentiment” as a “vengeful, petty-minded state of being that does not so much want what others have . . . the desire to live a pious existence and thereby position oneself to judge others, apportion blame”. (Buchanan, 2018) Frank, a closeted homosexual, denies his homosexuality as he considers it on a subconscious level, to be an act of immorality and thus people who dare to showcase their ‘deviated’ sexual orientation are bitterly abhorred by him. Pennington comments in this regard: “What appears to be a strictly homophobic reaction to the welcome given him by the Burnham’s other next door neighbors, a gay couple, turns out in retrospect to have been an anguished self-interrogation.” (Pennington, 2007, p.106)

As noted earlier, there are several smaller changes and missing scenes in the film from the script, but the most interesting is the one with a deeper explanation to Col. Frank Fitts’ backstory. In the final film, there are no overt expressions of how layered the Colonel’s feelings are until the beautifully vulnerable moment when he kisses Lester. In the actual script, however, it becomes evident much earlier that Col. Frank Fitts’ homophobia comes from his repressed homosexuality. When Colonel mistakenly believes that Ricky went to his study to steal money to do drugs, he goes to Ricky’s room in a violent bout of anger and thrashes his son before he even gets a chance to clarify his position. Eventually, he tells his father that he went to Frank’s study to show his girlfriend his father’s Nazi plate; Frank stumbles upon the only word he is supposed to stumble upon, he asks his son “Girlfriend?” As Frank glances toward the window and catches Jane there, he feels “suddenly, deeply shamed”. One later realises that Frank is both “deeply” shamed and relieved when he learns the truth. Ricky having a girlfriend relieves him from his deep-seated fear of fathering a homosexual son, a fear that he has long harboured in his heart of hearts. Perhaps it explains his seriousness towards “structure and discipline”. In the film script, right after this scene, Frank goes back to his study and opens a box of photographs. The script goes:

CLOSE on the grainy BLACK & WHITE PHOTOGRAPH in his callused hands: it’s of TWO YOUNG SERVICEMEN standing in front of a Jeep, both shirtless and wearing fatigues. Their muscular arms are draped lazily around each other’s shoulders as they grin for the camera. One of these men is the Colonel himself, albeit much younger - almost thirty years younger.

CLOSE on the Colonel’s face as he studies the photo. His breathing has finally relaxed; his face has gone vacant.

The undertone becomes clear here. The other serviceman in the photo with Colonel Frank Fitts is someone he had feelings for or they shared an intimacy when they were younger. This makes Frank’s homosexuality overt in contrast to the covertness which is finally filmed. This also explains another scene from the film very poignantly. Frank comes to Ricky’s room to give his son a ride to school. Rickey tells him he doesn’t need a ride. He “is going in with Jane and her mom.” Frank comes with Ricky to the door to see off his son to school. Lester approaches Ricky and mouths him to call him back. This doesn’t go unnoticed by Frank. It might be fair to assume here that Frank doesn’t like Lester and perhaps he is motivated – when he sees Lester running with the two Jims, he reacts “What is this? Fucking gay pride parade?” - to rethink about Lester’s sexual orientation. Frank seems suspicious about Ricky and Lester, although he doesn’t have a clue about the actual nature of their relationship (drug dealer/customer). After Ricky leaves, Frank goes to his room and the script reads:

The door swings open silently and the Colonel enters. He starts going through Ricky’s

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bureau. He opens the DRAWER in which we know Ricky keep his marijuana, but he doesn't discover its false bottom.

He stands and looks around, his eyes finally landing on: The DIGICAM and a stack of CASSETTES on a shelf. The camera is still connected to the TV. The Colonel turns on the TV, examines the Dicam and presses "play."

The Colonel watches . . . He takes the cassette out of the Dicam and inserts another. On the screen we see . . .

On VIDEO: Through the Burnham's GARAGE WINDOW, we see Lester step out of his pants and briefs. Then naked except for his black socks, he grabs the dumbbells and starts lifting them, watching his reflection in the window as he does. . .

The Colonel sinks slowly onto Ricky's bed, mesmerized.

Frank is "mesmerized" as he looks at Burnham, working out, naked. It becomes evident to the viewer that Frank is not disturbed by this tape, but rather his facial expressions suggest otherwise. One might pick it up as a clue hinting at his non-heteronormative sexual preferences.

And finally, all the pieces of the puzzle come together as we approach the climax of the film. One night, as we see, Ricky's beeper beeps while he is at the dinner table with his father and his mother is looking out of the window while it is raining outside. Ricky tells his parents that he has to go to the Burnham's to give Jane her geometry book back which she requires to do her homework. While in reality, he has received a message from Lester asking Ricky to bring him more marijuana over to his house. As Ricky enters the garage where Lester is waiting for him, Frank coincidentally catches the two of them at the window together. What ensues is a serious comedy but Frank reads the whole affair in a completely different light. The script will provide a better understanding of the action on film that is about to follow:

INT. FITTS HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUES

The Colonel rinses off his plate at the sink, something outside catches his eye, and he cranes his neck to get a better look at . . .

His POV: Through the window over the sink, we can see into the Burnham's GARAGE WINDOW. Our view is blurred by the RAIN, but we see Lester, his upper body pumped and glistening with sweat as he counts out a wad of BILLS . . . and Ricky walks into view.

The Colonel's face tightens.

His POV: Lester drapes his arm around Ricky as he gives him the money. We can only see Lester from the waist up, so he looks naked.

...

INT. FITTS HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The Colonel's POV: Lester leans back in his chair. We see only Ricky's back and shoulders as he rolls the joint. After a beat, Lester's jaw drops, then he throws his head back. From our perspective, it looks very much like Ricky is giving Lester a blow job.

The Colonel watches, incredulous. . .

To the audience, it is clear that Ricky is rolling a joint for Burnham, while for Frank, with his view blocked, interprets it as an act of oral stimulation. He goes to Ricky's room and waits for him to return. When Ricky finally arrives and puts the money in his manpurse, he is startled, for the Colonel has broken the silence of the room with his thunderous voice, asking his son "where did [he] get [the money]", Ricky, although surprised, tries to act normal and replies that he has received the money from his 'job'.

As we approach the end of the film, the final confrontation between the father and the son unfold in front of us where Frank accuses Ricky of being a 'faggot'. We look at Frank, devastated, fists clenched, tear in his eyes, throwing fragments for words at his son, but

incapable of hitting him. He is not staring at his son but a mirror. The walls around him fall over his head. Finally, Ricky has “discovered a way to break free from his father, and can’t believe it was this simple.” He knows how deep he would wound his father when he bursts out: “You are right. I suck dick for money; two thousand dollars. I’m that good. You should see me fuck! I’m the best piece of ass in three states!” Frank is brokenhearted. He orders his son to get out “standing there, glassy-eyed and breathing heavily.” Frank feels such vulnerability that he has never felt before. And believing Lester also to be a ‘faggot’ throws himself at him, only to discover that Lester is not what Frank thinks him to be.

Sigmund Freud in 1926 defined ‘Defence’ as “a general designation for all the techniques which the ego makes use of in conflicts which may lead to neurosis.” (Rycroft, 1995, p.32) In Freudian psychoanalysis ‘Denial’ is usually listed as a defence. In *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (1995) author Charles Rycroft defines ‘Denial’ as a “mechanism by which either (a) some painful experience is denied or (b) some impulse or aspect of the self is denied.” (Rycroft, 1995, p. 33) Frank is in denial of his sexual orientation. This is an aspect of his self that he cannot accept. Although, in his momentary vulnerability he has approached Lester, as soon as he discovers that he is mistaken he recedes to his ‘inauthentic self’. Frank Fitts kills Lester Burnham not because he has ‘come out of the closet’ in Lester’s presence, but because he has once again crawled back to his state of denial. Lester poses a threat to his ‘self’. He is a constant reminder of Frank’s ‘deviation’ and thus holds the key that my blow Frank’s psychic facade. He cannot confront the idea of him being a ‘faggot’ as he has, so far in the film, and beyond the film, in his life, tried to deny through rigorous military “structure and discipline.” It is like Frankenstein and Monster all over again. Frankenstein cannot withstand the sight of a monster not because he is ‘hideous’ but because it reflects Frankenstein’s own deviated self which he tries to repress and deny. Similarly, when Col. Frank Fitts encounters Jim and Jim he is reminded of his self, that he has learnt to disavow through facades. And therefore, Lester has to die. It is only through the death of Lester that Frank can only ‘live’. Living here connotes his psychological wellbeing and living in a perpetual state of denial. Pennington writes: “Lester’s journey, while seemingly on the verge of success for a brief moment, ends tragically when his quest intersects with the failed attempt by Ricky’s father, Colonel Fitts (Chris Cooper), to come to terms with his own repressed homosexuality.” (Pennington, 2007, p.106)

Thus, not only the death of Lester Burnham – the man who tried to revolt against the meaninglessness of his existence by symbolically discarding his life and existence of the past twenty years, and reaching back to his youth dies as Frank comes “to terms with his own repressed homosexuality” – but all the major events in the plot that lead it to its ultimate climax is an outcome of Frank’s repressed homosexuality. One might argue that it is Lester who gives the final nod to Frank that leads him to attempt the fatal kiss when Lester recounts to him that how their marriage is a “show . . . a commercial, for how normal we are. [when] we are anything but.” If he hadn’t told this to Frank, Frank might not have been mistaken to think that Lester is homosexual and their marriage is a “show” when in reality they [husband and wife] pursue their own sexual gratifications. Frank might not have attempted the kiss, Lester would not have “pushed” Frank, Frank would still have remained “in the closet” and Lester would have lived. But the verbal irony here sets the final act into motion. He seals his own coffin as Frank, who has misinterpreted many an actions and comments from the beginning, misinterprets this final comment as well. But in the end, it is Frank, and his deep-seated fears and insecurities that detonate and the splinters wound everyone through and through. In effect, one may surmise: “count no man happy till he dies, free of pain at last” (Fagles & B, 2000, p.251).

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